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SUBJECT: PUBLIC OPINION POLL REVEALS SUPRISING PERCEPTIONS
OF PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

REF: HARARE 00482

SUMMARY

1. A USAID-funded Post-Presidential Election Survey revealed some surprising results about the presidential election and the political environment. According to the poll, more than 72 percent of those surveyed said they voted, more than official numbers. Almost 40 percent of those surveyed would not reveal for whom they voted but for those who did disclose their votes more than 30 percent voted for opposition candidate Morgan Tsvangirai and less than 30 percent voted for President Robert Mugabe. Surprisingly, nearly 60 percent of those surveyed were opposed to mass action; the perception of electoral fairness was evenly divided; and more than 60 percent felt the post-election period was calm and non-violent. End Summary.

POST-ELECTION SURVEY RESULTS

2. In mid-September, the Mass Public Opinion Institute (MPOI)--Zimbabwe's only indigenous polling organization--released the results of a July public opinion survey, four months after the presidential election. The polling sample consisted of 1768 randomly selected people (50.7 percent rural and 49.3 percent urban) from all of Zimbabwe's provinces. Survey results revealed some surprising attitudes about Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) mass action, the fairness of the election, the desire for a government of national unity, and perceptions about the level of violence after the election. The survey was a follow-up to a poll conducted in February, prior to the presidential election, and used the same enumeration areas (with the addition of Mashonaland Central).

VOTER TURNOUT

3. More than 72 percent of the respondents said they voted--more than the official percentage of some 55 percent--with a higher turnout in rural areas than in urban ones (76 percent versus 68 percent). (COMMENT: This gap could be attributed to a reluctance by some to admit that they did not vote. END COMMENT.) In the pre-election survey 86.7 percent of respondents indicated that they intended to vote. Of those who did not vote, the reasons were split between not being registered (30 percent), not being in the home constituency on polling day (22 percent) and other reasons (21 percent). In Harare, the primary reason for not voting were the long lines (27 percent of respondents). More than half the Harare respondents waited in line for more than six hours and one-third waited in line for more than nine.

ELECTION RESULTS

4. Forty percent of respondents refused to disclose for whom they voted compared to 60 percent who refused to disclose their preferences in the pre-election poll. Overall, 30.5 percent of respondents said they voted for MDC candidate Morgan Tsvangirai while 27.4 percent said they voted for President Robert Mugabe. In contrast, the Zimbabwe Election Support Network, a coalition of thirty-eight non-governmental organizations formed to coordinate activities pertaining to elections, reported 43.1 percent voting for MDC and 56.9 percent for ZANU-PF. Predictably, more rural dwellers said they voted for Mugabe than urban dwellers (35 versus 18 percent) and 39.7 percent of urban residents voted for Tsvangirai. Masipula Sithole, director of the MPOI,

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estimated that 88 percent of those who would not reveal their votes, voted for Tsvangirai.

5. The following are survey results on voting from MPOI and ZESN:

MPOI:Mugabe/Tsvangirai/Secret ZESN:Mugabe/Tsvangirai

Harare: MPOI:16.6/46.1/35.4 ZESN:25/75
Bulawayo: MPOI:12.5/35.7/49.1 ZESN:18/82
Mash East: MPOI:32.3/20/46.2 ZESN:78/22

Mash West: MPOI:55.3/12.6/32 ZESN:72/27
Mash Central: MPOI:38.8/8.8/52.5 ZESN:84/16
Midlands: MPOI:37.7/18.8/42 ZESN:63/37
Mat North: MPOI:11.3/32.5/56.3 ZESN:64/36
Mat South: MPOI:8.6/38.6/50 ZESN:53/46
Manicaland: MPOI:12.3/46.1/35.4 ZESN:50/50
Masvingo: MPOI:54.8/14.1/31.1 ZESN:70/30
Total: MPOI:27.4/30.5/40.5 ZESN:56.9/43.1

OTHER FINDINGS

16. Surprises in the survey results include:

--The majority of respondents--56.9 percent--were against mass action, evenly divided among rural and urban areas. In Harare, slightly more than half of the respondents were opposed to mass action and in Bulawayo close to 62 percent were opposed. (COMMENT: These results suggest widespread concern that mass action would trigger violence and not provide an outcome that justifies the risks involved in participating in such an action. END COMMENT.)

--Slightly more people are in favor of a rerun of the presidential election (44.9 versus 40 percent). Manicaland, Harare and Matebeleland North are the three areas most in favor of a re-run. Surprisingly, Bulawayo respondents were not in favor of rerun (48.6 versus 44.5 percent). (COMMENT: It is interesting to note that people want a rerun but are not willing to engage in mass action, an important tool for forcing a rerun. END COMMENT.)

--People were evenly divided over the fairness of the election with 40.4 percent thinking it very free and fair and 41.4 percent not at all. (COMMENT: This result is a significant surprise, as we would have expected a widespread perception of the election as overwhelmingly fraudulent. END COMMENT.) Predictably, urban residents thought the election less free and fair than the rural residents (50.6 percent versus 32.5 percent).

--A smaller percentage of people favored a government of national unity after the presidential election than before (48.5 percent versus more than 60 percent in the pre-election survey). Thirty-five percent of respondents were opposed to a government of national unity. A higher percentage of rural dwellers were in favor of a government of national unity than urban dwellers (50.2 versus 46.7) but only 29.8 percent of rural people were opposed, compared to 40.4 percent among the urban residents.

--Prior to the election, nearly half the respondents--49.3 percent--thought the elections would be violent or very violent. In Harare and Bulawayo, 64.4 percent and 52.3 percent thought it would be violent or very violent, respectively. The post-election survey revealed that 64.1 percent of respondents thought the aftermath of the election was very calm with little to no violence or intimidation (68.5 percent in the rural areas and 59.6 percent in urban ones). In Harare and Bulawayo, 50.9 and 79.4 percent thought the post-election period was calm.

--Well over 50 percent of respondents in every province but one (Masvingo) said Mugabe should make his retirement plans known. This is the one question where there is agreement in all provinces regardless of party affiliation and across the rural/urban, gender, and age divides.

LAND IRRELEVANT

17. Prior to the election, respondents identified democracy and good governance as the most important issue for the government to address. After the election, the most important issue was the economy. The least important issue in both the pre- and post-election surveys was the land issue in both rural and urban constituencies.

COMMENT

18. We suspect that some respondents--particularly those in rural areas--were suspicious of poll takers and might not have been completely honest. Sithole posited that most of those who would not reveal for whom they voted likely voted for Tsvangirai. We have no way of confirming this nor does a comparison of MPOI and ZESN voting statistics suggest this voting pattern. END COMMENT.

SULLIVAN